

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6497

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY LONDON

UNCLAS DAMASCUS 1133

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, SY, IS

SUBJECT: SYRIAN PRESS REACTION TO ISRAELI CABINET
INITIATIVE TO END STATE-OF-WAR

1. SUMMARY: DAMASCUS PRESS HAS EXPRESSED SUSPICION
THAT ISRAELI CABINET DECISION TO EMPOWER U.S. TO
EXPLORE FURTHER NEGOTIATIONS BASED ON FORMULA ENDING
STATE-OF-WAR IS MERELY PRETEXT FOR ISRAELI AGGRESSIVE
ACTION AGAINST SYRIA, OR REVIVAL OF STEP-BY-STEP
DEIPLOMACY, OR MANEUVER TO JUSTIFY AMERICAN PROCRASTINATION
CONCERNING PROGRESS TOWARD COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT
WHILE U.S. PREOCCUPIED WITH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS.
END SUMMARY.

2. FOLLOWING TWO DAYS OF CRITICISM BY COLUMNISTS OF
ISRAELI CABINET DECISION TO EMPOWER U.S. TO EXPLORE NEW
PEACE INITIATIVE BASED ON ENDING STATE-OF-WAR,
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ISSUE GIVEN HEADLINE ATTENTION IN FEB 26 AL-BAATH

WHICH CHARACTERIZED IT AS A "MISLEADING MANEUVER (AIMED AT) DECEIVING WORLD PUBLIC OPINION." AL-THAWRAH BRANDED IT "THE NEW AMERICAN-ISRAELI DECEIT." ARTICLES CITED ALLEGED STATEMENT BY UNIDENTIFIED ISRAELI OFFICIAL THAT MOVEMENT TOWARD ENDING STATE-OF-WAR WOULD NOT EXCLUDE POSSIBILITY OF WAR THIS YEAR ON EASTERN FRONT AS INDICATION PROPOSAL INTENDED TO SHOULDER ARABS WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR WAR WHICH "ISRAEL APPARENTLY IS PREPARING." ARTICLES CLAIMED PROPOSAL ALSO DIRECTED AT EXTRACTING U.S. AND ISRAEL FROM GENEVA OPTION, NOW STATEMATED BY ISRAELI REFUSAL TO ATTEND CONFERENCE WITH PLO. THIRD, ARTICLES DESCRIBED IDEA AS "ATTEMPT TO REVIVE STEP-BY-STEP POLICY IN NEW GARMENT."

4. COLUMNISTS FOUND VARIOUS POSSIBLE MEANINGS BEHIND ISRAELI DECISION. ONE EXPRESSED VIEW THAT U.S. PRE-OCCUPIED WITH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS UNTIL SPRING 1977 AND THEREFORE "NOT IN POSITION TO ADOPT DECISIVE POSTURE TOWARD ME CONFLICT UNTIL IT FINISHES ELECTION BATTLE." CONSEQUENTLY, ISRAELI ACTION "WILL NECESSARILY LEAD TO AMERICAN PROCRASTINATION UNTIL AFTER ELECTIONS." SECOND COLUMNIST ANALYZED PROPOSAL AND CONCLUDED THAT "NO CHANGE HAS OCCURED IN ISRAELI POLICY TOWARD ME PEACE." HE SCORED IT AS MANEUVER DESIGNED TO GAIN TIME FOR ISRAEL AND PRESERVE STATUS QUO THROUGH "METHOD OF PLEDGES AND PROMISES IN WHICH AMERICA EXCELS." ANOTHER COLUMNIST STATED THAT TERMINATION-OF-BELLIGERENCY CONCEPT AGAIN IDENTIFIES U.S. FULLY WITH ISRAELI POLICY, DESPITE AMERICAN ATTEMPTS TO DRAW DISTINCTION BETWEEN ITS MILITARY-FINANCIAL ROLE SUPPORTING ISRAEL AND ITS ROLE AS MEDIATOR OF CONFLICT. FOURTH COLUMNIST OPINED THAT THIS "NEW FORMAT" PRESENTED FOLLOWING

"FAILURE OF TRADITIONAL FORMULATIONS PROPOSED BY AMERICA WITH ISRAEL'S CONSENT" DOES NOT DIFFER FROM "OLD FORMULA" EXCEPT IN METHOD AND TACTICS. HE ASSERTED THAT AMERICAN-ISRAELI ATTEMPTS TO SETTLE CONFLICT WOULD NOT BEAR FRUIT UNTIL THEY ACCEPT AS STARTING POINT SECURING OF "PALESTINIAN RIGHTS RATHER THAN PALESTINIAN

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INTERESTS AND WITHDRAWAL FROM THE ARAB LANDS INSTEAD OF WITHDRAWAL FROM ARAB LANDS."

4. COMMENT: IT WAS INEVITABLE THAT SYRIAN PRESS WOULD LABEL ISRAELI INITIATIVE ON "ENDING STATE-OF-WAR" AS A MANEUVER. ALTHOUGH NO SYRIAN OFFICIALS HAVE AS YET COMMENTED TO US ON SUBJECT, WE BELIEVE, FROM COMMENTS OF SEVERAL OFFICIALS ON THIS FORMULATION WHEN IT HAS

COME UP IN PAST, THAT THEY REGARD IT WITH EQUAL
SUSPICION.
PELLETREAU

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